

A LETTER  
TO  
THE REV. DR. PRIESTLEY,  
RESPECTING HIS LATE PUBLICATION  
OF  
MR. WESLEY'S LETTERS;  
AND CONTAINING  
SOME ANIMADVERSIONS  
ON HIS  
ADDRESS TO THE METHODISTS,  
WHICH HE HAS PREFIXED TO THOSE LETTERS.  
By PHILALETHER.

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TO

THE REV. DR. PRIESTLEY.

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SIR,

YOU have lately sent forth into the world a number of original letters which passed between Mr. Wesley and some of his relations. To these you have prefixed an account of the letters, with an address to the Methodists; in the latter of which, it is to be feared, your zeal has led you, however inadvertently, to transgress the bounds of truth and equity. This, Sir, I think, should be pointed out to you; because it seems, through the multiplicity of your engagements, to have escaped your own notice; and because the passages I refer to, if suffered to pass without animadversion, may be productive of considerable harm. Not being a Methodist myself, nor having any con-

nection with their societies, it seems to be out of my province to interfere in this matter ; more especially as there are many among the Methodists themselves, who are more deeply interested, and abundantly better qualified for the task. Yet if I may be the means of pointing out to you what is faulty in your conduct, and of guarding them against what is pernicious in your counsels, I shall have no cause to repent that I have written to you on this occasion.

The subjects upon which I would address you are three—first, *On the impropriety of your publishing those letters at all.*

From the date of those letters we observe that the latest of them was written above fifty years ago : they originated, you tell us, in Mr. W.'s desire to justify his own conduct to some of his friends. At the same time you inform us that “ they were not intended  
 “ for the public eye—that Mr. W. was very  
 “ desirous of getting them into his possession—that the daughter and grand-daughter  
 “ of his brother Samuel, being offended at his  
 “ conduct, would never deliver them to him,  
 “ taking it for granted that he would have  
 “ suppressed



“suppressed them.” Now, Sir, if he was so desirous to suppress them, what right had you to publish them? You say, “that the public is interested in them:” true, the *curiosity* of the public may be interested, but not the *welfare*. But you wanted to shew that he was “strongly tinged with enthusiasm.” Well, if you thought so, and wished to expose it, would not his early journals have furnished you with full as plain and authentic an account of his sentiments as these letters can do? and would they not have been a more *honourable* source of information? Let me ask you, Sir, whether your publishing these letters *against his will* be agreeable to that precept of “doing unto others as we would they should do unto us?” You can easily see that neither your sentiments in religion, nor your conduct in politics, could justify the mob in destroying your property: may you not then perceive, even from your late calamities, that you should have held sacred what every man of honour would have esteemed another’s property? Your having the letters in your possession, and consequently in your power, was no more a rea-

son for your abusing that power to the wounding of Mr. W.'s character, than the populace having your house in their power, was a reason for their abusing that power to the destruction of your property. Let me then appeal to your own conscience: Did you act right in making those letters public; in publishing them not only without his approbation, but expressly and knowingly against his will; and that too, not while he was living, and might answer for himself, but immediately after his death; as if that opportunity had been waited for? What though his relations kept the letters for this purpose, because they were offended with him? You had no reason to be offended with him; he had never injured *you*. What though they continued their resentment through such a long series of years? Was there any reason that *you* should join in their hostilities against him? Was it not your province rather, as a Christian minister, to reprove their unforgiving spirit, and to dissuade Mr. Badcock from concurring with them? Did it become you, who could have no cause to be offended with him, to step forth as the *patron* and *instrument*

of *their* revenge? Was this, Sir, doing as you would have another do to you?

The next subject to which I would call your attention is, *the end which you propose in publishing them*. It is to make the Methodists “think better of you” and of your principles; or, in other words, to draw them away (their leader being dead), and to make them your own disciples. We must take it for granted, that you suppose yourself to be in possession of truth, and them to be in error; and on this ground we cannot blame you for wishing to make them profelytes. But in the beginning of your address to them, you pay them the highest compliments; you say that “in promoting the great end of the gospel, viz. the reformation of the world, their zeal is abundant, and highly meritorious; far beyond what most professors of Christianity can pretend to.” You tell them that “by them is the gospel preached to the poor in this country, and that to them is owing the civilization, the industry, and sobriety, of great numbers of the labouring part of the community:” you assure them that, “in the full persuasion of the great

good which they are instrumental in the hands of God of rendering to their country and to the world, you truly rejoice." Now, Sir, can any thing like this be spoken of your followers? Pray then let your own principles manifest their superior efficacy in producing the general good, before you attempt to dissolve the union of those who have approved themselves so beneficial to mankind.

But, Sir, permit me to ask, Whither would you lead the Methodists? Do you yourself know whither you would lead them? Are you come to any determinate point in which you yourself can rest? Is your own creed yet fixed? No; you have acknowledged that it is not: but, Sir, ought you not at least to be satisfied with your own principles before you invite others to embrace them? The Methodists at present have a full persuasion that, at least in all the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, they are right; and they feel an unspeakable comfort in this persuasion: will they then have any cause to thank you, for endeavouring to turn them from the truths whereon all their hopes are fixed, and to bring them to a state of fluctuation



tion and uncertainty? Surely, Sir, this is an end, which is scarcely worthy of your pursuit; an end too, which, I trust, will never be attained.

The principal and last subject to which I would turn your attention, respects *the means by which you would effect your end*. Not to advert to many circumstances, I will only mention a few which are peculiarly deserving notice.

In order that you may put the Methodists off their guard, to prevail upon them to read your books, you tell them (p. 22) that “ Mr. W. has often declared in your hearing, that methodism had nothing to do with any particular opinions in religion, that the end of all religion was good morals, and that every man who had this object was his friend.” On what occasion Mr. W. uttered these words we cannot tell, nor need we be solicitous to enquire; for, if properly understood, they breathe the true spirit of Christianity. But, Sir, do you seriously think Mr. W. meant to say that Methodism had nothing to do with original sin, justification by faith, the atonement, the  
Divinity

Divinity of Christ, the influences of the Spirit, &c.? Would not this have been to contradict all he had ever taught either from the pulpit or the press? And yet you evidently intend that they who read your address, should understand him in that sense. Is this, Sir, ingenuous? Is it not a wilful misrepresentation of his meaning?

Again (p. 24), in order to gain the Methodists over to your own party, you use expressions which have an evident tendency to widen the breach between them and their Calvinistic brethren. You say “ we do not,  
 “ with the Calvinists, believe that the Di-  
 “ vine being has, without any regard to men’s  
 “ future characters and good works, predef-  
 “ tinated some to everlasting life, and others  
 “ to everlasting condemnation.” What, Sir, need you be told that the Calvinists in general do not believe the doctrine of *absolute reprobation*? They do firmly believe indeed that, if they have any good in them, it is entirely owing to the grace of God which He has bestowed upon them, without any respect to *merit* in their works, whether past, present, or future: but that God ever determined to  
 damn

damn men, without any respect to *demerit* in their works, past, present, or future, *this* they do not believe : none believe this except a certain class of Calvinists, for whose sentiments, in this particular, the rest do not esteem themselves by any means responsible. The Methodists themselves are well acquainted with this distinction. An eminent writer of their own (the Rev. John Fletcher) says, (in his Bible-Arminianism and Bible-Calvinism, p. 48), “ *Rigid Calvinists* are persons who hold the Manichean doctrine of absolute necessity, and maintain both an unconditional election of free-grace in Christ, and an unconditional reprobation of free-wrath in Adam. *Moderate Calvinists* are men who renounce the doctrine of absolute necessity, stand up for the election of free-grace, and are ashamed of the reprobation of free-wrath ;” he might have added also, that they shudder at the very thought of it. And could you, Sir, be unacquainted with this ? I should hope indeed you were ; for, to calumniate some, in order more effectually to win others, would be a very ungenerous and unbecoming artifice.

But

But that which, above all, is reprehensible in your address is, what you assert in p. 25. Your words are these: “ In what then, my  
 “ brethren, do we differ? hardly in any thing  
 “ except in our opinion about *who Christ was*;  
 “ not with respect to what He *taught*, or *did*,  
 “ or *will do*, which however is all that parti-  
 “ cularly interests us.” Now, Sir, if I were addressing you merely as a private Gentleman, I should think it my duty to be very cautious of saying any thing which might either hurt your feelings or wound your character; but I feel that obligation exceedingly increased, when I am speaking to a Minister and Ambassador of God, on whose reputation for probity and veracity so much depends: yet how to deliver my sentiments on this passage, how to expose it as it ought to be exposed, and yet say nothing which may give you offence; I own I find very difficult. In most cases we may distinguish between the man and the sentiment, and combat the latter, while we love and admire the former; but how to separate them here I know not: let however your assertions speak for themselves:

“ You



“ You differ not with respect to what  
 “ Christ taught.” Pray, Sir, do not the  
 Methodists agree with almost all the Protef-  
 tant churches, in believing that Christ taught  
 original sin \*, the new birth †, and justifi-  
 cation by faith ‡? Whether these doctrines be  
 true or not, is nothing to our present purpose :  
 the question is, do not they believe that  
 Christ *taught* these doctrines? and did not  
 you know that they were of this opinion? Yes,  
 Sir : but are *you* of this opinion? Do  
 you believe that Christ taught these doctrines  
 in the sense in which they do? No—Tell  
 me then, Sir, what construction can charity  
 itself put upon this assertion, which shall ac-  
 quit you of deliberate falsehood?

Again—“ You differ not with respect to  
 “ what Christ *did*.” Do not the Methodists  
 believe, not merely that Christ suffered, but  
 that in suffering he made a true and proper  
 atonement for sin? Yea, are not all their  
 hopes founded upon this doctrine? But, Sir,  
 do *you* believe that Christ *did* this? Do you  
 believe that he actually made an atonement

\* John, chap. iii. v. 6.

† Chap. iii. v. 3.

‡ Chap. iii. v. 15, 18, 36.

for our sins ? How shall we then account for your professing to agree with them in every thing Christ *did*, when you utterly disagree with them in the most important thing he ever did ?

Again—" You do not differ with respect " to what Christ will do." Let me once more appeal to yourself: do not the Methodists believe, that Christ will come unto them, and make his abode with them; that he will teach them as truly as ever he taught his disciples in the days of his flesh; that he will comfort and strengthen them; that he will manifest himself to them as he does not unto the world; and that, upon the footing of his own meritorious death, he will make intercession for them at the right hand of God? I do not ask you what interpretation you put on the passages in scripture to which I allude, but whether you understand them in the sense in which the Methodists do? Do *you* believe the doctrines which *they* believe to be contained in them? You know, Sir, you do not. Let me ask you then, Sir, Did you write this paragraph through inadvertency, or did you write it deliberately? If  
you

you wrote it inadvertently, it will surely become you to retract it: let the world know, Sir, that it was an oversight; and do your utmost to prevent the circulation of so gross a mistake. Consider, that, if the Methodists credit your assertions, they will read your books under the expectation of finding all the doctrines, on which they build their hopes, inculcated and enforced; and thus they will fall into a snare through their unwillingness to entertain an uncharitable thought of you. Let me entreat you therefore to pay a greater regard to your own character, than to suffer such notoriously false assertions to pass uncontradicted by yourself. Any man may err, and inadvertently affirm, what on maturer consideration he would condemn; but no one can continue to circulate a falsehood, especially if it be of such a pernicious tendency as those above referred to, without forfeiting all right and title to the character of an honest man: for *your own* sake therefore, as well as *theirs*, let your acknowledgment be speedy, full, and unequivocal. But, if you refuse to acknowledge that the paragraph was written *inadvertently*,  
 what

what must the world think? Surely they must conclude that you wrote it *deliberately*, for the purpose of imposing on the Methodists, and of drawing them over to your own party. Will they not then justly ask, "Where is your probity? Where is your regard to conscience?" Oh! Sir, cut off all occasion for such reflections.

After professing to agree with the Methodists in these things, you challenge them to produce one passage in support of the *only* point wherein you differ; "shew me, if you can, say you, a single admonition against not worshipping Christ as God." This, Sir, is a striking example of the artful way, which you take to promote and propagate your own sentiments; you have been repeatedly confuted by fair argument\*, and therefore you have recourse to methods which are calculated only to perplex an honest mind. Let

\* Dr. P. has recommended his books to you, and particularly his appeal; permit me therefore to recommend a tract which *fully* refutes all his arguments which are there urged against the divinity of Christ. It is entitled, "A short Defence of the Doctrine of the Divinity of Christ;" and is printed for John Binns, Bookseller, in Leeds; price three-pence.



us suppose for a moment, that there were no express admonition against not worshipping Christ as God; would that omission invalidate all which the scriptures have affirmed respecting the Deity of Christ? Is it not very sufficient for us that Christ is expressly called God; that the attributes and works peculiar to Jehovah are ascribed to him; that the apostles prayed to him as God, and that Stephen in his dying moments worshipped him in the very same words, in which Christ in his dying moments had worshipped the Father? These, Sir, are the grounds upon which we think ourselves bound to worship Christ: and are they not very sufficient without any admonitions against not worshipping him? Are we, Sir, to despise God's directions, because he has not seen fit to give us admonitions? Are we at liberty to dictate to God, and to tell him in what manner he shall speak? You see then, Sir, there would be no force in your objection, even if it were true: but I think that an unprejudiced reader may find admonitions as well as directions and examples. What does God say by the prophet Isaiah? (xlv. 22, 23.) Look

unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else; I have sworn by myself that unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. These, Sir, you yourself will acknowledge to be the words of Jehovah. And does not St. Paul expressly apply them to Christ? Does he not say (Rom. xiv. 10, 11) we shall all stand at the judgment-seat of *Christ*; for it is written, As I live saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God? You will say, “ the  
 “ apostle is only speaking of our standing at  
 “ the judgment-seat of Christ, and not of  
 “ our worshipping him :” true; but, in order to confirm that solemn truth, he quotes the words of the prophet, wherein Jehovah himself requires the highest acts of worship to be paid to him. Now we cannot suppose he would do this, if Christ were not that very person before whom every knee must bow, and to whom every tongue must confess. And how can Christ be that person, without being at the same time Lord and God? Yet, if this be the case, then it must be Christ himself who is speaking by the prophet: and,  
 if

if Christ swear thus by himself, that every knee shall bow to him; is not this equivalent to the strongest admonition against our not bowing to him? Let us bring another instance from the words of our Lord himself: he tells us (John v. 23) that all judgment is committed to him, "that all men should honour " the son:" but how are they to honour him? as a mere creature? No, they must honour him, "even as they honour the Father." I am aware that the word which we translate, *even as*, often means nothing more than a *resemblance*: but in this place I apprehend it must denote *equality*; because the Jews themselves understood him as making himself equal with God, and were seeking to kill him on that very account, ver. 18; and because, in the verses that precede and that follow this passage, he claims an equality with the Father both in respect of his self-existence and of his power to raise the dead; vid. v. 21, 26. If we add to this, that the Jews on other occasions also considered him as "making himself God" (John x. 33), and that he is said by St. Paul, to have "thought it no robbery to be equal with God" (Phil. ii. 6),

it will appear that we are fully justified in interpreting this passage, as requiring men to honour Christ *equally* with the Father. But still the question will recur; what admonition is there against our not honouring him in this exalted manner? Read the next words; “ He that honoureth not the Son, “ honoureth not the Father who hath sent “ him.” Now, Sir, you yourself will allow, that not to honour the Father must bring inevitable destruction on our souls: and yet Christ declares that the not honouring of him even as they honour the Father, will be construed as a neglect of honouring the Father. Can there possibly be a stronger admonition than this?

Observe, Sir, I offer not these as the *principal* grounds of our worshipping Christ; we have plainer and stronger reasons than these, even such as I have before mentioned; we see so many proofs of his Godhead in the scriptures, such plain commands to worship him, and so many instances wherein prayer was addressed to him by his own apostles, that we dare not do otherwise than worship him as God. Nevertheless from these passages the  
Methodists



Methodists may see how groundless your objections are, and may learn to guard against the artifice with which they are proposed.

With respect to what you tell them, “that you once thought as they now do,” that will have but little weight with them: while they behold you publishing those letters against Mr. W.’s will; while they consider how you have misrepresented Mr. W.’s words, and, above all, what unparalleled assertions you make respecting the agreement of your sentiments with theirs; at the same time that light and darkness do not differ more from each other, than *they* do from *you* in all the fundamental doctrines of Christianity: I say, when they consider these things, your conduct will not impress them with any favourable opinion of your change; nor will they feel themselves much inclined to follow your example. They will rather be stirred up to watchfulness and circumspection; and will see more forcibly the necessity of attending to that advice of the apostle, “Be not  
“children tossed to and fro and carried about  
“with every wind of doctrine, *by the sleight of*  
“*men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in*  
“wait

“ *wait to deceive* ; but speaking the truth in  
 “ love, grow up into him in all things, who  
 “ is the head, even Christ.” Indeed, after  
 seeing what *means* you use, they will be na-  
 turally led to suspect your *end*. We would  
 gladly give you credit, for wishing only to  
 promote their spiritual welfare : but if that  
 be the case, what need can there be to use  
 such means ? Religion needs not artifice, nor  
 admits of “ taking any man by guile.” If  
 indeed you wish to attach them to your cause  
 as a *political* character, and make religion sub-  
 servient to that end, then we must not won-  
 der to see truth and equity trampled under  
 foot ; for it must be confessed, that so numer-  
 ous a body as the Methodists would be a great  
 acquisition to your party. But, whatever be  
 your view, your labour, I trust, will be in  
 vain ; for they are far too remote from your  
 principles, both in religion and politics, to be  
 ever found amongst your followers : they  
 venerate the bible too much, to join with  
 him who denies so great a part of it ; and they  
 love their country too well, to aid those who,  
 under the idea of reforming the constitution,  
 would eventually undermine and destroy it.

Give

Give me leave therefore to conclude my letter with a word of advice both to *you* and *them* : to *you* I recommend that you would clear yourself to the public, as from the other things pointed out in this letter, so especially from the very strong appearances of wilful and deliberate falsehood ; but to *them* I say in the words of the apostle (Col. ii. 6, 7), “ As  
 “ ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord,  
 “ so walk ye in him ; rooted and built up  
 “ in him, and established in the faith as ye  
 “ have been taught ; abounding therein with  
 “ thanksgiving.”

I am, Sir, yours,

Sept. 6th, 1791.

PHILALETHES

THE END.

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